

# MESOPOTAMIAN MINUTE

## - Current News on Agriculture & USDA in Iraq -

Office of Agricultural Affairs, U.S. Embassy, Baghdad

Sunday, June 19, 2011



**Basrah Date Farming**— For the second time in six months, PRT Basrah hosted California date palm experts from Phoenix Agrotech, and facilitated meetings with numerous local and national Iraqi date palm farmers, agribusinesses and government officials. Because southern California's soils, climate and water situation are very similar to Basrah's, the visit by these experts is critical to the improvement of the date economy. California agriculturalists have developed over the past 80 years an extensive body of knowledge regarding water management and soil salinity, which is applicable to southern Iraq's situation. Iraqi funded project plans for model date farms and modern alfalfa and wheat farms are being developed. More than 50 key Iraqis who attended the strategic partnering meeting now have a vision of what agriculture could be in southern Iraq.



**New Cotton Gin In Kirkuk** – USDA Agricultural Economist and Ministry Advisor, John M. Schnittker and Mr. Abbas, Director of the Kirkuk Cotton Gin recently visited the nearly completed cotton gin in Kirkuk. The new gin was constructed entirely with Government of Iraq funds. It will supplement the existing private sector cotton gins now operating in Kirkuk. The gin uses new equipment purchased from BC Supply of Lubbock, Texas. PRT Kirkuk was instrumental in rebuilding the cotton gin and in its sourcing of U.S. manufactured equipment. Cotton planted area across Kirkuk exceeded 25,000 hectares during the late 1990s, and planting area is up this year in Kirkuk, and across Iraq. Last year Kirkuk's cotton crop was snapped up by local traders, who outbid private sector gins and resold the cotton domestically and on the export market.



**Iraq's Wheat Harvest In Full Swing** – USDA Agricultural Counselor, Ron Verdonk and Agricultural Economist, John Schnittker recently visited Kirkuk Province in Northern Iraq and participated in an aerial crop survey arranged by Dr. Bill Tierney and Mr. George Stickels, USDA's PRT Agricultural Advisors in Kirkuk. Crop prospects ranged from very good to poor, with dry land wheat prospects faring worst. Still irrigated fields in some areas also suffered from a lack of timely water application, compounded by weed problems. Kirkuk's 2011 production prospects closely parallel Iraq's which are expected to be below last year's excellent crop. Note in the photo that the straw is being dropped, rather than spread; it will also be harvested, ground and mixed with wheat bran for use as animal feed.



**USDA Participates In UN Wood Food Program Workshop** – USDA Agricultural Economist and Ministry Advisor, John M. Schnittker recently led a one-day workshop sponsored by the United Nations World Food Program (UN-WFP) in Arbil, Kurdistan. The workshop addressed the role of international commodity exchanges, and also included an introduction into price analysis techniques. This workshop was one of a series of workshops sponsored by the UN-WFP to address Government of Iraq commodity procurement issues. Approximately 50 Government of Iraq provincial and national level officials from the Ministry of Trade and Ministry of Education attended the workshop. Iraq is a major importer of wheat, sugar, rice and vegetable oil, for use in the Public Distribution System, and is exploring the idea of introducing a school lunch program.

**Personnel Update** - There are currently 20 USDA personnel in Iraq including those with Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), at Embassy Baghdad or embedded with U.S. military units. With this issue we say good bye to Wayne Marcus who did a rock solid job as Ag Advisor to PRT Muthanna.

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